

Against the Grain

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Booklover-Writing

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"I write. I write that I am writing. Mentally I see myself writing that I am writing, and I can also see myself seeing that I am writing. I remember writing and also seeing myself writing. And I see myself remembering that I see myself writing, and I remember seeing myself remembering that I was writing, and I write seeing myself write that I remember having seen myself write that I saw myself writing that I was writing and that I was writing that I was writing that I was writing. I can also imagine myself writing that I had already written that I would imagine myself writing that I had written that I was imagining myself writing that I see myself writing that I am writing." **Salvador Elizondo's** words define the page prior to the title page of **Mario Vargas Llosa's** *La tía Julia y el escribidor* (Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter) and sets the reader up for the complexities of writing layered in a humor-spiced love story.

The Swedish Academy awarded **Mario Vargas Llosa** the 2010 Nobel Prize in literature "for his cartography of structures of power and his trenchant images of the individual's resistance, revolt, and defeat." My introduction to **Vargas Llosa** was on a trip to Tampa to visit a good friend. The introduction was courtesy of this friend, who shares a passion for reading all types of literature and is also immersed in Latin American literature. She knew of my affection for **García Márquez's** works and felt I could expand my horizons south of the Colombian border into Peru. An interesting recommendation, as **Vargas Llosa's** works are considered more "realistic" than **García Márquez** and because there is an unresolved rivalry between the two friends. What began as a friendship ended with an argument and a black eye for **García Márquez** at the hand of **Vargas Llosa** in Mexico City's Palacio de las Bellas Artes in 1976. So I read. I see myself writing about reading. Mentally I see myself reading on that trip to Tampa, and I type.

I am unsure why my friend suggested this particular novel by **Vargas Llosa**, as it has been almost 15 years since I first read the novel, for he is better known for his ability to blend social consciousness and political activism with literature. He even ran for the President of Peru in 1990 advocating privatization. *Conversation in the Cathedral*, *The Feast of the Goat*, and *The Green House* are more typical of this social/political blend. He has now left the political arena and concentrates on the writing: "Nothing better protects a human being against the stupidity of prejudice, racism, religious, or political sectarianism, and exclusivist nationalism than this truth that invariably appears, in great literature: that men and women of all nations and places are essentially equal." This novel, however, takes a little bit different direction. It is a love story, a love for an older woman entwined with a love for the profession of writing.

The story begins: "I was very young and lived with my grandparents in a villa with white walls in the Calle Ocharcán in Miraflores." The storyteller is studying law, but "deep down what I really wanted was to be a writer someday. I had a job with a pompous-sounding title, a modest salary, duties as a plagiarist, and flexible working hours: News Director of Radio Panamericana." His fascination with writers emerges with every word, sentence, and point of view on the page, and then he meets **Aunt Julia**, a recently divorced relative that is several years his senior. He hated her instantly. But this love story, based loosely on his own life, has all the elements of a soap opera: passion, family disgrace, May-December marriage, and melodrama as the story merges with his obsession for **Pedro Camacho's** radio serials and the creative process required to tell a good story.

Rereading **Vargas Llosa's** story about the scriptwriter's journey into the creative world

that places a story on paper is currently surreal for me. For the last year or so I have had the distinct pleasure of assisting a dear friend in crafting a story he needed to tell. To read a book in development has placed me on a sunny window seat with a voyeur's view into this world of writing. Words, research, sentence structure, point of view (omniscient or close third person), dialogue, character development, read, discuss, more words. And the process continues until the story begins to dance on the page and I find myself living in the historic mystical world my friend is creating. When I emailed him this column for review he responded with a challenge that he had posed to his writer's group: "Do books sometime choose writers to bring them to life? Google 'writers, writing' and you will find a majority are about the books that 'have' to be written; that 'demand' to be written. One year ago I went to an annual writer's conference with four book projects that I was working on. Three of the four got good critiques and encouraging comments and had the enthusiastic support of friends and families. The fourth had none of the above. In fact it had nothing going for it except that it demanded to be written. So I wrote it. I set aside the other projects, neglected family responsibilities and friends, and surrendered my life to this doubtful book just because it told me to. This year I went back to the same conference and found out that the book was right." Then he set out to discover quotes by famous authors about the profession of writing, the obsession of writing, the passion for writing. A fantastic dark comical foray into the minds of famous writers. I will leave you the quote he credited to **Toni Morrison**, another Nobel laureate in literature, which most addresses the point: "If there's a book you really want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it." 🐾

From the Reference Desk from page 55

Congress and the Nation series is found at <http://www.cqpress.com/product/Congress-and-the-Nation-Series-1945.html>.)

The **Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology** (2010, 978-0470170243, \$700) is now in its fourth edition. Published by **Wiley**, the latest version of this four-volume set keeps the emphasis on psychology (there is no "and Behavioral Sciences" in the title of the new edition) while maintaining the set's international flavor. Editors **Irving B. Weiner** and **W. Edward Craighead** mix updated entries from past editions with new articles commissioned

for this set. As in past editions the entries end with a valuable list of references and/or suggested readings and "see also" references. This edition seems to have more emphasis on biographies with "63 of the most distinguished persons in the history of Psychology" covered in individual articles, and 543 others listed in a separate section of brief entries noting their dates, research interests, and areas of expertise. A sense of serious scholarship and a desire to inform, the cornerstones of past editions, are equally evident here. This new edition deserves full consideration from academic libraries whether they own prior editions or not. (It is also available from the **Wiley Online Reference** at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.nuncio.cofc.edu/book/10.1002/9780470479216/homepage/Order.html>.) 🐾

Rumors from page 53

CALENDAR!) so he is not disappearing. Hooray! And **Doug** sent a great Holiday card from **American Institute of Physics** about the vortices created by airplane wingtips. The image from **D. Harris**, **V. Miller**, and **Charles Williamson** is from the January 2010 *Physics Today*.

<http://blogs.physicstoday.org/>

The vivacious **Eleanor Cook** won the **ABC-Clio/Vicky Speck Charleston Conference Leadership Award** this year! **Eleanor** has contributed so much to the Conference over the years not the least of which are the skits. Congratulations, **Eleanor!**

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